

WE CLAIM AS OUR INVENTION:

1. A method for enabling a postage meter machine for franking postal matter comprising the steps of:

providing a base unit with a printer unit, having an identification code, for printing franking imprints on postal matter respectively representing monetary values that are debited in an accounting unit in said meter;

coupling said base unit to a meter to form a postage meter machine;

after coupling said meter and base unit, and before initialization of said postage meter machine, establishing communication between said postage meter machine and a data center remote from said postage meter machine and transmitting said identification code from said postage meter machine to said data center;

at said data center, evaluating said identification code and, if said identification code is valid, transmitting an enable code from said data center to said postage meter machine; and

allowing said postage meter machine to frank postal items only after said enable code is transmitted to said postage meter machine.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1 comprising providing said printer unit with a serial number and using said serial number as said identification code.

3. A method as claimed in claim 2 comprising assigning said serial number to said printhead upon manufacture of said print head, and storing said serial number in an electronic memory associated with said printhead.

4. A method as claimed in claim 1 comprising, after establishing communication between said postage meter machine and said data center, executing a remote recrediting between said postage meter machine and said data center with an additional data transmission for transmission of said identification code.

5. A method as claimed in claim 1 comprising storing said identification code at said data center allocated to additional data selected from the group consisting of customer data, postage meter machine data and time data.

6. A method as claimed in claim 1 comprising tracking a location of said base unit and said printer unit at said data center dependent on said identification code transmitted to said data center.

7. A method as claimed in claim 1 comprising cryptographically encrypting said transmission between said postage meter machine and said data center.

8. A system for franking postal items, comprising:

a postage meter machine comprising a meter coupled to a base unit, with a printer unit in communication with said meter for producing franking imprints on postal items with respective values of said franking imprints being debited in an accounting unit in said meter, said printer unit having an identification code;

a data center located remote from said postage meter machine;

said postage meter machine having a communication arrangement which, after coupling said meter to said base unit, establishes communication with said data center and transmits said identification code to said data center; an evaluation arrangement at said data center for evaluating said identification code and, if said evaluation code is valid, for transmitting an enable code from said data center to said postage meter machine; and enabling circuitry in said postage meter machine for enabling said printer unit to generate said franking imprints only after said postage meter machine receives said enable code.

9. A system as claimed in claim 8 wherein said data center includes a memory for storing said identification code allocated to further data, selected from the group consisting of customer data, postage meter machine data and time data.

10. A system as claimed in claim 8 wherein said data center includes a tracking unit for tracking a location of said base unit and said printer unit dependent on said identification code transmitted to said data center, and for detecting tampering at said postage meter machine dependent on said tracking.

11. A postage meter machine comprising:

a base unit;

a meter coupled to said base unit and a printer unit in communication with said meter, said printer unit producing franking imprints on postal items with respective franking values debited in an accounting unit in said meter, said printer unit having an identification code;

a communication arrangement adapted to establish communication between said postage meter machine and a data center remote therefrom which, after coupling said base unit and said meter and before initialization of said meter, transmits said identification code to said data center; and

an enabling circuit allowing said printer unit to generate said franking imprints only after receipt of an enable code at said postage meter machine from said data center in response to transmission of said identification code.